

AN
INTERESTING EVENT

THACKERAY

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WILLIAM MAKEPEACE
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BY
MR. TITMARSH



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NOTE

AN INTERESTING EVENT by William Makepeace Thackeray, first appeared in *The Keepsake* for 1849, published in London by David Bogue. The same year, a few copies of this item (probably less than a dozen) were issued in separate form. At the recent sale of the library of the late Augustin Daly, Esq., one of these volumes brought the sum of two hundred and fifteen dollars.

Although this little story is in Thackeray's happiest and most characteristic vein, it has never been included in any

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collected edition of his works, nor has it ever been reprinted in separate form.

The text here followed is that of *The Keepsake* for 1849, pages two hundred and seven to two hundred and fifteen.



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SITTING the other day alone at dinner at the club, and at the next table to Smith, who was in conversation with his friend Jones, I could not but overhear their colloquy, or, rather, Mr. Smith's communication to his friend. As, after all, it betrays no secrets of private life ; as his adventure, such as it is, may happen to any one of us ; and as, above all, the story is not in the least moral or instructive, I took the liberty of writing it down, as follows :—

“I could not go to that dinner at the Topham Sawyers,” Smith remarked,

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“where you met the Duke, and where Beaumoris sat next to Miss Henrica Hase (whom I certainly should have manœuvred to hand down to dinner, and of course should have had as good a chance as Bo of proposing for her, of being accepted, and getting a wife notoriously consumptive, and with six thousand a-year),—I could not go to the Topham Sawyers, because I had accepted an invitation to dine with my old schoolfellow Budgeon. He lives near Hyde Park Gardens, in the Tyburn quarter. He does not give dinners often, and I make it a point, when I have said I will go to a man — dammy, sir, I make it a point not to throw him over.”

Jones here remarked that the wine

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was with Smith, which statement the other acknowledged by filling up a bumper, and then resumed :—

“I knew that the Budgeons had asked a large party, and, indeed, all their crack people; for I had seen Mrs. Budgeon in the Park the day before, driving by the Serpentine in her open carriage, and looking uncommonly interesting. She had her best folks,—she mentioned them; nor did I forget to let her know that I was myself invited to the Topham Sawyers on the same day,—for there is no use in making yourself too cheap; and if you *do* move about in a decent circle, Jones, my boy, I advise you to let your friends know it.”

Jones observed that he thought the

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claret was corked, and the filberts were fine. Smith continued:—

“I do not always array myself in a white neckcloth and waistcoat to go to dinner, Jones; but I think it is right on grand days to do so—I think it’s right. Well, sir, I put myself into my very best fig, embroidered shirt, white waistcoat, turquoise buttons, white stockings, and that sort of thing, and set out for Budgeon’s at a quarter to eight. I dressed here at the Club. My fool of a servant had not brought me any white gloves though; so I was obliged to buy a pair for three-and-sixpence, as we drove by Houbigant’s.

“I recollect it was the thirty-first of June, and, as a matter of course, it was

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pouring with rain. By the way, do you *bake* your white neckcloths in damp weather, Jones? It's the only way to keep 'em right."

Jones said he thought this was a better bottle than the last.

"I drove up, sir, to Budgeon's door at Hyde Park Gardens, and of course had a row with the scoundrelly cabman about his fare. I gave him eighteenpence; he said a gentleman would have given him half-a-crown. 'Confound your impudence, sir!' said I. 'Vell,' said the impudent brute, 'vell, I never said you vos one.' And at this moment Budgeon's door was opened by Cobb, his butler. Cobb was still in pepper-and-salt trousers, which surprised me. He looked

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rather dubiously at me in the cab.

“‘Am I late?’ says I.

“‘No, sir; only — you have n’t got your note? But my master will see *you*, sir. You stop here, cab.’

“And quitting the vehicle, of which the discontented rascal of a driver still persisted in saying, that ‘a gentleman would gimmy ’alf-a-crownd,’ I entered Mr. Budgeon’s house, splashing my white stockings in the mud as I went in, to the accompaniment of a hee-haw from the brute on the cab-box. The familiarity of the people, sir, is disgusting.

“I was troubled as I entered. The two *battans* of the hall-door were not cast open; the fellows in black were not there to bawl out your name up the

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stairs; there was only Cobb, in a dirty Marsella waistcoat, jingling his watch-chain.

“‘Good Heavens, Cobb!’ says I — for I was devilish hungry — ‘what has happened?’ And I began to think (for I have heard Budgeon is rather shaky) that there was an execution in the house.

“‘Missis, sir — little girl, sir — about three o’clock, sir — master will see you — Mr. Smith, sir.’ And with these words Cobb ushered me into the dining-room, where Budgeon sat alone.

“There was not the least preparation for a grand dinner, as you may suppose. It is true that a soiled and crumpled bit of old table-cloth was spread at one corner of the table, with *one* knife and fork

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laid ; but the main portion of the mahogany was only covered with its usual green baize, and Budgeon sat at a farther end in his dressing-gown, and writing letter after letter. They are a very numerous family. She was a Miss Walkinghame, — one of the Wiltshire Walkinghames. You know her name is Fanny Decima, and I don't know how far the teens in the family went. Budgeon has five sisters himself, and he was firing off notes to all these amiable relatives when I came in. They were all, as you may suppose, pretty much to the same effect ; —

“ ‘ My dear Maria,’ (or Eliza or Louisa, according to circumstances), ‘ I write a hasty line to say that our dear Fanny has just made me a present of a fifth lit-

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the girl. Dr. Bloxam is with her, and I have the happiness to say that they are both doing perfectly well. With best regards to Hickson' (or Thomson, or Jackson, as the case and the brother-in-law may be), 'I am, my dear, &c., affectionately yours, LEONARD BUDGEON.'

"Twenty-three of these letters to relatives, besides thirty-eight to put off the dinner and evening party, Budgeon had written; and he bragged about it as if he had done a great feat. For my part, I thought, with rage, that the Topham Sawyers' dinner was coming off at that minute, and that I might have been present but for this disagreeable *contre-temps*.

"'You're come in time to wish me

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joy!’ says Budgeon, looking up from his *paperasses* in a piteous tone and manner.

“ ‘Joy, indeed!’ says I. In fact, I wished him at Bath.

“ ‘I’m so accustomed to this sort of thing,’ said he, ‘that I’m no longer excited by it at all. You’ll stay and dine with me, now you’re come.’

“I looked daggers at him! I might have dined at the Topham Sawyers, I said, but for this sudden arrival.

“ ‘What is there for dinner, Cobb? You’ll lay a cover for Mr. Smith.’

“Cobb looked grave. ‘The cook is gone to fetch Mrs. Walkinghame. I’ve kep the cab, to go to Queen Charlotte’s Hospital for — for the nuss. Buttons is

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gone out with the notes, sir. The young ladies' maid has took them to their haunt Codger's; the other female servants is busy upstairs with missis, sir.'

" 'Do you mean there's no dinner?' cries Budgeon, looking as if he was relieved though. 'Well, I have written the notes. Bloxam says my wife is on no account to be disturbed; and I tell you what, Smith, you shall give me a dinner at the Club.'

" 'Very good,' I growled out; although it is deuced hard to be obliged to give a dinner when you have actually refused the Topham Sawyers. And Cobb, going up to his master's dressing-room, returned thence with the coat, hat, and umbrella with which that gentleman

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usually walks abroad.

“ ‘Come along,’ said I, with the best grace; and we were both going out accordingly, when suddenly the door opened, and Mrs. Wake, Mrs. Budgeon’s maid, who has been with her ever since she was born, made her appearance.

“A man who has in his house a lady’s maid who has been with his wife ever since she was born, has probably two tyrants, certainly one, over him. I would not take a girl with ten thousand a-year and a maid who has been with her from the nursery. If your wife is not jealous of you, that woman is. If your wife does not know when you slip in from the Club after midnight, that woman is awake, depend upon it, and hears you go upstairs.

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If, under pretence of a long debate in the House of Commons, you happen to go to Greenwich with a bachelor party, that woman finds the Trafalgar bill in your pocket, and, somehow, hears of your *es-
capade*. You fancy yourself very independent, and unobserved, and that you can carry on, you rogue! quite snugly and quietly through life. Fool! you are environed by spies, and circumvented by occult tyrants. Your friends' servants and your own know all that you do. Your wife's maid has intelligences with all the confidential females and males of your circle. You are pursued by detectives in plain (some in second-hand) clothes, and your secrets are as open to them as the area-gate by which they en-

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ter your house. Budgeon's eye quailed before that severe light blue one which hawk-beaked Mrs. Wake fixed upon him.

“‘You're not a going out, sir?’ said that woman, in a cracked voice.

“‘Why, Wake, I was going to—to dine at the Club with Mr. Smith; that's all,—with Mr. Smith, you know;’ and so, of course, *I* was dragged in.

“‘I'll tell my missis, sir, that Mr. Smith wished to take you away; though I'm sure he didn't know her situation, and a blessed baby born only five hours, and the medical man in the house.’

“‘Hang it!’ says I, ‘I never asked—I—that is ——’

“‘O! I dessay, sir, it was master as

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aſt hiſſelf,’ Mrs. Wake answered. ‘And my poor miſſis upstairs, and I’ve been with her ever ſince ſhe was born, and took her from the month,—that I did, and *I* won’t deſert her now. But I won’t answer for her life, nor Doctor Bloxam won’t, if maſter ſhould go out now, as you are a goin’ to, ſir.’

“‘Good Heavens, Wake! why ſhouldn’t I? There’s no dinner for me. You turned me out of Mrs. Budgeon’s room when I went upstairs, and ordered me not to come up again.’

“‘She’s not to be diſturbed on no account, ſir. The dear ſuffering think,’ Mrs. Wake ſaid, ‘Her *mar* is coming, and will ſoon be year, that’s *one* comfort, and will keep you company.’

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“ ‘Oh yes, Mrs. Walkinghame,’ Budgeon ruefully said. ‘Where is she to sleep, Wake?’

“ ‘In the best bedroom, sir ; in coarse, in the yellow room, sir,’ Wake answered.

“ ‘And — and where am I to go?’ asked the gentleman.

“ ‘Your things is halready brought down into the study, and you’re to sleep on the sofy and harm-chair, of course, sir,’ the other said.

“ Budgeon, now, is a very stout, bulky little man, the ‘sofy’ is only a rout-seat, and the arm-chair is what you call a Glastonbury — an oak-chair ornamented with middle-age gim-cracks, and about as easy as Edward the Confessor’s fauteuil in Westminster Abbey. I pictured the

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wretch to myself, stretched out on a couch which a fakeer or a hermit would find hard to lie on.

“‘Oh, thank you!’ was all the cowed slave could say ; and I saw at once, from his behaviour to that supercilious female and the bewildered obedience which he appeared to bestow on her, that there was some secret between them which rendered the domestic the mistress of her employer. I wonder what it could have been, Jones? She had read private letters out of his waistcoat pocket, very likely. At any rate, my dear fellow, when you marry, take care to have no secrets, or of submitting to an inquisitor over you in the shape of a lady’s-maid.”

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Jones (who, by the way, is not, I should say, a man of much conversational power) just thanked Smith to pass the bottle ; and the latter resumed his harrowing narrative.

“As we were conversing in the above manner, there came a banging knock at the door,—one of those coarse, vulgar, furious peals which a cabman, imitating a footman, endeavours to perform. We all started guiltily as we heard it. It was most likely some outlying guest, who, like myself, had not received his note of excuse, and had come forth to partake of Budgeon’s most Barmecidal entertainment.

“‘And you haven’t even a-tied up the knocker?’ said Mrs. Wake, with a look

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of withering scorn. The knocker had slipped his memory, Budgeon owned. At which the maid said, 'Of course.' Of course she said of course.

"Now Mrs. Wake, looking savagely round her and round the room, saw on the table my Gibus' hat, which I had set down there, and in it my bran new white gloves, that I had bought at Houbigant's for three-and-sixpence. A savage satisfaction lighted up her eyes as she viewed them, and diving down into her pocket, and producing thence a piece of string, this fiend in human shape seized hold of my gloves with a sarcastic apology, and said she was sure I would have no objection to her tying up the knocker with them, and preventing her missis from be-

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ing knocked to death. So she sailed out of the room with my three-and-sixpence in her hands, and, being a tall, bony woman, who could reach up to the knockers without difficulty, she had each of them soon muffled up in a beautiful white French kid, No. 8½.

“ ‘You see how it is, old boy,’ Budgeon dismally said. ‘Fanny doesn’t like my leaving the house; and, in her delicate condition, of course, we must humour her. I must come and dine with you some other day. We have plenty of time before us, you know. And tonight I must stop and receive my mother-in-law and take a mutton-chop at home.’

“ ‘Take a mutton-chop at home, indeed!’ The wretched man little knew

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what truth he was telling there ; for, I give you my honour, sir, five minutes afterwards, Mrs. Wake, having finished tying up the door with my gloves, and all the other servants of the house being absent upon various errands connected with the interesting occasion, she reappeared amongst us, holding an uncovered dish, on which there were two cold mutton-chops left from the children's dinner ! And I left the unhappy man to eat these, and went away to devour my own chagrin.

“It was pouring with rain, sir, as I went down the street. There are no cabs within a mile of Hyde Park Gardens ; and I was soon wet through, and my shirt-front and cravat all rumpled with rain ; otherwise, I might have gone into a

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tavern and dined, and slipped into the Topham Sawyers in the evening. But I was too great a figure for that; and I was forced, positively, to come back to this Club to take my morning clothes out of the bag, and reassume them, and to dine here at my own charge, after having refused one of the best dinners in London."

"Is that all, old boy?" Jones asked.

"All! no, it isn't all!" said Smith, with a horrid shriek of laughter. "Look here, sir." And he pulled out a note, which he read, and which was to the following effect:—

"Dear Smith,— You were the first person in the house after an interesting

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event occurred there, and Fanny and I have agreed that you must be godfather to our little stranger. Both are doing very well, and your little god-daughter elect is pronounced by the authorities to be the prettiest and largest child ever seen of her age.

“ ‘Mrs. Walkinghame is still with us, and Wake allows me to go out sometimes. When will you give me the dinner you promised me at the Megatherium? We might go to Vauxhall afterwards, where Van Amburgh, I am told, is very interesting and worth seeing.

Yours ever, dear Smith,

“ ‘LEONARD BUDGEON.’

“ ‘There, sir,’ cried Smith, “is n’t that

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enough to try any man's patience? Just tot up what that 'interesting event' has cost me — not the dinner to Budgeon, who is a good fellow, and I don't grudge it to him — but the rest. Cabs, four shillings; gloves, three-and-six; Henrica Hays, whom I might have had with two hundred thousand pounds; and add to this a silver mug or a papboat, which will cost me four or five pound, and a couple of guineas to that vixen of a Mrs. Wake;— and all coming from an interesting event."

"Suppose we have coffee?" Jones remarked. And as I could not listen decently any more to their conversation, I laid down the newspaper and walked away.

FINIS

This edition consists of two hundred and twenty-five copies, twenty-five of which are on Japanese vellum.



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